

July 18, 2013

This brief position statement is in regard to Common Core State Standards – Math (CCSS-M).

We are in the process of implementing CCSS-M in grades K-12 in the El Dorado School District. It has come to our attention that there is a movement that is opposed to this implementation. Although some of the rhetoric is targeted at the collection of information by the federal government and our affiliation with PARCC and the PARCC assessment, some of the argument by those that are opposed deals with the effects of implementation. I would like to address a few of those points.

CCSS-M is much more rigorous than the Curriculum Frameworks for Mathematics that we have been using. Both the skill sets and the level at which students operate will be much more challenging for not only our students, but also our teachers. Up to now, the focus of mathematics instruction has been on memorizing procedures and “answer-getting”. Two years into implementation of CCSS-M, we have witnessed a shift to deep conceptual understanding and problem-solving. Our early elementary students can not only do the math, they can tell you why it works!

The challenges we face deal more with training teachers and retraining our middle- and upper-level students to operate at this higher level. In short, we were not taught this way nor were we taught to teach this way. The emphasis on the meaning of numbers and place value will improve student performance and properly prepare them for more advanced topics. This style of teaching and learning has been identified as the key to the success of countries that perform at a higher level on internationally benchmarked assessments. I am convinced that not implementing CCSS-M at the K-5 level would pose a substantial setback for the students we serve.

Our hope is that when students leave elementary, they will have a deep understanding of mathematics and have the tools necessary to be successful in the upper middle grades and high school. A close inspection of the content standards at those grade levels indicates much of what we have taught in high school Algebra I and Geometry courses is now taught in grades six through eight. Indeed, students who finish Algebra II at the high school level will be deemed “calculus ready” as opposed to current students that need to take another course after Algebra II to achieve that status. When implemented properly, CCSS-M will insure that even students who waive Smart Core and take the easiest pathway through high school will do much of the same mathematics that our students that complete Pre-Calculus do now.

We are two years into the struggle but it has been a productive struggle. I ask for your continued support of the implementation of CCSS-M.

Tom Simmons
District Mathematics Chair
El Dorado Public Schools